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STATEMENT BY SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON

50th Anniversary of the Peace Corps

Fifty years ago a pilot program called the Peace Corps started with President Kennedy's signature, led by Sargent Shriver and fueled by the compassion and generosity of the American people. Today this is the foundation of a public service movement that represents the best the United States has to offer. More than 8,600 Peace Corps volunteers from all 50 states serve in 77 countries as community leaders, teachers and mentors. They are united by a desire to create a more peaceful, prosperous world from the ground up. Peace Corps volunteers make a difference, whether it is teaching in a classroom, distributing bed nets to assist in malaria prevention, or sharing ideas that inspire the planet's young people.

As Secretary of State, I was fortunate to swear-in a group of new volunteers who are now serving in the Philippines. I have seen firsthand the enthusiasm of volunteers and staff in Guatemala, Ukraine, the Kyrgyz Republic, Cambodia and in other countries around the world. I have met volunteers who are old and young, first generation Americans, and the sons and daughters of returned volunteers. In Morocco, I met volunteer Muriel Johnston, who at 86 years old encourages all of us to think about what we can accomplish at any age. Peace Corps volunteers represent the diversity of our great country and share one common attribute: they inspire millions of people around the world to think about what we can accomplish together.

Every day, I work with dedicated colleagues at the State Department and USAID, many of whom paved the foundation for their careers in the Foreign Service and civil service with their years in the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps taught them compassion, patience, and continues to bridge cross-cultural divides.

On this 50th anniversary, the United States honors the over 200,000 Americans who have answered the call to serve and thanks the 139 countries that have welcomed Peace Corps volunteers as family and friends for half a century. Let us take this opportunity to remember President Kennedy and Sargent Shriver's vision and rededicate ourselves to a world of deeper cultural understanding where every man, woman and child has the opportunity to live up to his or her potential.

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